

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2070

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

S E C R E T RANGOON 2705

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, UR, CH, VN, XC

SUBJ: USSR-SRV STRATEGY AGAINST PRC IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

REF: (A) KUALA LUMPUR 4346, (B) RANGOON 2391, (C) MOSCOW 7247

SUMMARY: KUALA LUMPUR (REFTEL) CONFIRMS THAT THE SOVIETS ARE ASSOCIATING THEMSELVES WITH VIETNAM'S "SMILES CAMPAIGN" (THOUGH DATUK HUSSEIN CLAIMS CREDIT FOR HIMSELF), BUT FINDS THE SOVIETS AT LEAST AS HEAVY HANDED AS EVER IN RELATIONS WITH MALAYSIA. THE SIGNS OF INCIPIENT SOVIET LIGHT-HANDEDNESS NOTED BY RANGOON MAY HAVE BEEN ILLUSORY; ON THE OTHER HAND, SIGNS OF A
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SOVIET SHIFT TOWARD LIGHT-HANDEDNESS MAY MAKE A DELAYED

APPEARANCE IN MALAYSIA. IN ANY CASE, SOVIET LACK OF FINESSE WOULD NOT INVALIDATE RANGOON'S GENERAL THESIS, THAT THE USSR IS IN FAVOR OF AND LIKELY TO SUPPORT SRV MODERATION AS A WAY OF CONTAINING PRC INFLUENCE, THAT PRC FAILURE TO SOFTEN ITS OWN POLICIES HELPS THE SOV/SRV EFFORT, AND THAT THE END PRODUCT (ASSUMING THE SRV PLAYS ALONG IN THE MODERATE ROLE) COULD BE RELATIVELY GOOD NEWS FOR US AND OUR FRIENDS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE MAIN ARGUMENT OF MY "WHO'S AHEAD?" CABLE COULD BE FAIRLY RECAPITULATED AS FOLLOWS: (A) THE USSR WOULD LIKE TO LIMIT PRC INFLUENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA; (B) THE PRC ENJOYS VERY IMPORTANT LONG-TERM ADVANTAGES; BUT (C) THE PRC HAS NOT ACTED CONSISTENTLY SINCE THE VIETNAM DEBACLE TO INCREASE ITS DIPLOMATIC INFLUENCE, AND IT IS STILL VIEWED WITH SOME SUSPICION; (D) VIETNAM IS SURPRISING MOST OF US WITH ITS "SMILES CAMPAIGN"; (E) THE SRV "SMILES CAMPAIGN" HAS POTENTIAL FOR SOMEWHAT LIMITING PRC INFLUENCE, A CONSEQUENCE PLEASING TO THE SOVIETS; (F) THE SOVIETS MAY BE PURSUING A CONSCIOUS POLICY OF BUILDING UP VIETNAM AND ENCOURAGING HANOI IN ITS "SMILES CAMPAIGN"; (G) IN SUPPORT OF THE LATTER INFERENCE, IT LOOKS FROM RANGOON AS IF THE SOVIETS ARE BEING UNUSUALLY (FOR THEM) LIGHT-HANDED IN THEIR DIPLOMATIC TACTICS VIS-A-VIS SEA AND LETTING HANOI CARRY THE BALL; (H) IF THIS IS SOVIET POLICY, VIETNAM CAN PROBABLY EXTRACT A GOOD DEAL OF ECONOMIC BENEFIT AND DIPLOMATIC INFLUENCE FROM THE SITUATION; AND, FINALLY, (8) IF VIETNAM MUST KEEP SMILING IN ORDER TO REAP THESE GAINS, VIETNAM'S GAINS WOULD NOT NECESSARILY BE OUR LOSS.

2. AS I READ REFTEL (A) (KUALA LUMPUR'S 4346) AMBASSADOR UNDERHILL SEEMS TO HAVE MOST SERIOUS DOUBTS ABOUT POINTS (F) AND (G) ABOVE; EVIDENTLY THE SOVIETS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN RELATIONSHIP AND INFLUENCE WITH MALAYSIA FASTER AND FURTHER THAN KUALA LUMPUR LIKES, AND HAVE NOT BECOME ANY MORE LIGHT-HANDED IN THEIR DIPLOMACY. ALSO, OFFICIALS IN KL ARE INCLINED TO ATTRIBUTE THE VIETNAMESE "SMILES CAMPAIGN" TO THE SUCCESS OF THEIR OWN, RATHER THAN SOVIET, POLICIES.

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3. ODDLY, I FIND IN PARA 7 OF REF (A) CONFIRMATION OF MY OWN INFERENCE FROM STATEMENTS OF SOVIET DIPLOMATS IN RANGOON;--I.E., THAT THE SOVIETS TAKE CREDIT FOR "SOFTENING THE VIETNAMESE STAND", FOR PHAN HIEN'S VISIT, ETC. THIS SUGGESTS THAT THE SOVIETS, AT LEAST, MAY THINK THEY ARE FOLLOWING THE POLICY LINE I OUTLINED. WHICH RAISES A NEAT PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION: IS A NATION'S

POLICY WHAT IT THINKS IT IS TRYING TO DO, OR IS IT THE
ACTUAL RESULTS ATTAINED?

4. AS TO SOVIET HEAVY-HANDEDNESS, UNTIL VERY RECENTLY
(LIKE FOUR OR FIVE MONTHS AGO) ALMOST ALL RANGOON-BASED
DIPLOMATS WOULD HAVE CALLED SOVIET BEHAVIOR VIS-A-VIS
BURMA ALSO "GRACELESS", "CLUMSY", AND SUCH LIKE
SYNONYMS FOR HEAVY-HANDED. MANY WOULD STILL USE
THESE TERMS, AND ON AN ABSOLUTE BASIS THEY WOULD NOT
BE FAR WRONG. HOWEVER, RELATIVE TO PREVIOUS SOVIET
POSTURE AND TACTICS, AND UNDER THE MICROSCOPE, THERE
APPEAR SIGNS OF A SOVIET ATTEMPT TO BE LIGHT-HANDED,
AT LEAST IN RANGOON.

5. MAYBE SIGNS OF SOVIET LIGHT-HANDEDNESS WILL
APPEAR LATER ON IN KUALA LUMPUR. IT WILL BE INTEREST-
ING TO HEAR HOW THE SOVIETS IN FACT REACT TO THE
TEMBELING DAM TURNDOWN. ON THE OTHER HAND, SIGNS OF
THE OLD FAMILIAR HEAVY-HANDEDNESS MAY REAPPEAR TO
PLAIN VIEW HERE IN RANGOON. IF IT SHOULD TURN OUT
THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT AFTER ALL BECOME LESS
HEAVY-HANDED, THIS WOULD OF COURSE NOT NECESSARILY
INVALIDATE THE ARGUMENT RECAPITULATED IN PARAGRAPH
ONE ABOVE. IT COULD SIMPLY MEAN THAT THE SOVIETS
HAVE NOT ACHIEVED FULL CONSISTENCY IN PURSUIT OF
THEIR NEW POLICY LINE.

6. I WOULD WELCOME OTHER COMMENTS.
OSBORN

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